Integrated Family Support in the North East

Evaluation report

The Integrated Family Support Project is a national initiative which started in May 2011 with funding from the Department for Education and the National Offender Management Service. The project provides a two pronged family support intervention; one in the prison and one in the community. The project is being delivered by a partnership of NEPACS and pact. NEPACS is delivering the work in the North East and pact is delivering the work based in the south of England and in Wales. This is a summary of the evaluation carried out in March 2012; it presents the emerging findings after eight months of the project.

In the North East, there is a total of 1.5 full time equivalent Integrated Family Support Advocates (IFSA) working in the community across the North East and three Integrated Family Support Workers (IFSWs) working in HMYOI Deerbolt, HMP Frankland and HMP and YOI Low Newton (the latter is funded by LankellyChase Foundation and the Pilgrim Trust, but the work is identical and so it is being included in this evaluation). In the south of England and Wales, there are four IFSA and eight IFSWs

Integrated Family Support Advocates

In the community, the Advocates are supporting the development of a workstream that supports the children and families of offenders. They are working with local authority agencies and partnerships, such as Integrated Offender Management units and Troubled Families or Think Family groups. The objective of the work is to improve outcomes for children and families and to break the cycle of intergenerational crime. A foundation of this work is the Hidden Sentence training which is the first step in raising awareness and developing a local service response.

Most of the Advocates’ work is policy development. For example, making sure there are local authority area policies and strategies about the need to support the children and families of offenders, or bringing key people together, such as senior Children’s Services staff and Reducing Reoffending Coordinators to ensure services for offenders’ families are integrated and targeted. There is also operational work. For example, supporting the development of user groups or ensuring information is available for visiting families that can direct them towards family support. Expanding the agencies carrying out CAFs (Common Assessment Framework) on families affected by imprisonment such as constituent agencies of local IOM programmes.

This interim evaluation has found that the policy and operational development carried out by the Advocates is having a direct impact on the service received by children and families affected by imprisonment. Increased services for children and families in the community ultimately results better outcomes and less risk for both adults and children.

What is also noteworthy is that the work of the Advocates is making a hidden population visible to services. During the research for the children and families guidance, a consistent theme was local authority agencies not knowing extent or locations (they did not know how many prisoners’ families there were and where they lived); they were essentially a hidden population. This is echoed by others, for example, the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People, commented recently: ‘The truth is we don’t really know [how many]. The reason we don’t know is we simply don’t count them, and the reason we don’t count them is because they are invisible’ (Barnardo’s, 2009). By working with local agencies, bringing together children and adult services, increasing awareness by delivering Hidden Sentence training,
the Advocates are making a hidden population increasingly seen. This is the first step in delivering services and improving outcomes.

**Integrated Family Support Workers**

For the IFSWs in the North East, they are working in three very different establishments; a young offenders institution, a women’s prison and a high security establishment. The Workers have provided different types of support to both prisoner and visitors in the different establishments. These have included:

- In HMYOI Deerbolt, support has been provided to prisoners and visitors, with slightly more prisoners receiving support (n=51) compare to visitors (n=37). Prisoners have mainly wanted support to help their family members and children visit because they have lost touch, become estranged or cannot afford to visit. Fathers at Deerbolt have also wanted to participate in the parenting course and have their children visit at the father child days, which has strengthened family ties. Visitors have wanted support in answering their concerns about the welfare of prisoners, and their troubled mental or emotional states.

- At HMP Frankland, support has been provided to slightly more visitors (n=20) than prisoners (n=16). Visitors have required support over their welfare and also to follow up their concerns over prisoner welfare (bullying, mental health). Prisoners have required support with wanting more family contact or to see their children more often. The IFSW has often liaised with solicitors and Social Workers to see if this is permitted. Issues of public protection are clearly paramount with the prisoner population in Frankland.

- At HMP and YOI Low Newton, there has been a very high prisoner caseload (n=139) and a low visitor one (n=11). Prisoners have required support mostly about having contact with their children, getting updates of care proceedings and finding out about the welfare of their children with carers. Much of the work is about contact Social Workers and solicitors.

Although the work may be different in the different prisons, many of the impacts of the interventions are the same. The similarities include:

- The IFSW support has resulted in increased family contact: this has been between parents and other family members of prisoners and between prisoners and their children. There is evidence from the case files to show that without the work of the IFSWs, prisoners would not have received the visits they have done. As the evidence indicates (e.g. Ditchfield, 1998 and Mat et al 2004) this then reduces the likelihood of offending in this group of prisoners.

- The interventions result in less tension and a calmer and better behaved population: whether this is due to a prisoner reestablishing contact with his estranged mother, increased contact between a father and his child or to a mother finally knowing that the outcome of a care proceeding has resulted in her child being adopted. The interventions result in either increased contact or the prisoner knowing and understanding about a decision. The latter, whilst it is often bad news, allows closure and a moving on. This in turn leads to better Safer Custody and better prison outcomes - less self harming and less violent incidents. At HMYOI Deerbolt, in a sample of 10 prisoners who had received interventions from the FSW, they had a cumulative total of 40 adjudications in the three months before the intervention. In the three months during and after the intervention, the same 10 prisoners had zero adjudications.

- The IFSWs produce a calmer and less stressed visiting population by responding to visitors concerns about prisoners welfare or addressing their own welfare needs. Visitors who have good information are more likely to be helpful to the prison, either in the manner in which they visit or through the information, for example, on bullying or intimidation, they provide that they would not normally receive. Correct information also counters the misinformation that prisoners may sometimes give their visitors: this also results in visitors telling prisoners to ‘behave themselves’.

- Makes the job of the prison staff easier: prison staff lack the time to respond to prisoners’ concerns relating to families or it is outside of

> “I think it will make John [prisoner] more aware of what being in prison does to families”.

Grandmother talking about the father child visits reducing reoffending and improving outcomes for children
their remit. However prisoners often approach the Wing Officers or Offender Managers with their queries. The IFSW stops the prisoners “pestering them” as one Offender Manager put it. A calmer prison population and prisoners who do not self harm (and so are not on an ACCT) also benefits the work of the prison.

There are of course other impacts for example, the project has brought community agencies into the prison which would not have otherwise happened. These have been to the benefit of both community agencies and the prison and have contributed to broad reducing re-offending efforts and improving outcomes for families. For example, Sure Start is now delivering parenting courses in HMYOI Deerbolt enabling it to fulfill one of their core objectives, reaching both fathers and a hard to reach group. Ultimately this action improves outcomes for children through improved parenting and reduces risk of harm, through working with fathers and telling them about community parenting and family resources that can be used and their purpose.

There is also evidence that the project is leading to a change in prison culture and attitudes. Prison staff in the male establishments were generally very skeptical about the work of the IFSWs at the beginning of the project. However as the project has matured, the Prison Officers have witnessed the impact of the work and the number of referrals from Officers have increased considerably. For example, if there has been an incident concerning a prisoner, Officers will immediately make a referral.

Conclusion
The Integrated Family Support Project is a groundbreaking initiative. Creating a community and prison response to the needs of children and families of offenders has never been attempted before. Already the results have been very encouraging; developing workstreams and providing for prisoners’ family related needs.

It is still early in the project with most staff only being in post for eight months. As such the project is still evolving and as it progresses its impact will become better understood (this evaluation will continue in a formative function until the project ends). The level of integration between prison and community elements will also increase as the project progresses. The project also has had unintended outcomes. NEPACS has now been commissioned by Stockton Drug and Alcohol Action Team to provide Family Support Workers in HMP Holme House and HMP Kirklevington for 12 months. These positions will also be evaluated and their impacts monitored.

However, the project needs to secure continuation funding soon to allow the project the space and opportunity to build upon its early successes and plan and also avoid the risk of the high quality staff from seeking more permanent employment elsewhere. The project needs to look at funding possibilities from pooled regional budgets or from NOMS and the DfE centrally. These discussions need to take place immediately.

“...we wouldn’t be in the prison if it wasn’t for the Family Support Worker.”
Senior Family Worker, Sure Start.

Prisoners on the parenting course at HMYOI Deerbolt pose for a picture.
Dads at Deerbolt and father child visits

Before the advent of the FSW at HMP YOI Deerbolt, the father child visits were sporadic and poorly attended. One of the early tasks of the FSW was to look into the reasons why prisoners did not attend the days. She found that prisoners were anxious about and reluctant to spend time with babies and young children and felt they lacked familiarity and skill.

As a result, the FSW contacted the local Sure Start and asked if they could run a parenting course in the prison dealing with issues for new fathers. Sure Start then designed a specific course which drew elements from existing parenting course such as Incredible Years and the Social Baby. The course called D.A.D (Dads at Deerbolt) was a two day course, designed for first time fathers, which looked at antenatal elements, and techniques and methods of play and interaction.

Participation on the father child visits have increased significantly as prisoners want to put into practice what they have learnt on the D.A.D.s course. The FSW reported about the visits:

‘Both Tamsin and Nigel [Sure Start workers] attended the Father Child to offer support when needed, they were summoned for help several times ... this was to help change nappies - everyone noticed the increase in dirty nappies at the end of the visit (think we need a nappy bin!) and we agreed the increase was due to a new found confidence from dads who have attended the course, as prior they would have waited until baby’s mum or gran were available to change it.

The course has been reviewed and tweaked for the better, as we have listened to the offenders and what they would like incorporated into the course these are more practical tasks and childhood illnesses and signs to watch for. I have also asked for more on domestic violence as this went down well with the prisoners in December. I would like to incorporate a group discussion on both domestic violence and post natal depression. In relation to the latter, one of the inmates said his partner has it but does not like to talk about it or ask her on the phone as he does not know or understand what it is’. There is currently a growing waiting list of more than 40 prisoners who want to attend the D.A.D.s course.

For more information on the evaluators, Barefoot Research and Evaluation, see: www.barefootresearch.org.uk

About PACT

The Prison Advice and Care Trust (pact) is a charity which supports people affected by imprisonment. They provide practical and emotional support to prisoners’ children and families, and to prisoners themselves. Pact works at a number of prisons across the UK by supporting the families of prisoners, running visitors centres outside prisons and children’s play services in prison visits halls.

More information: www.prisonadvice.org.uk

About NEPACS

NEPACS has been working in the North East of England for 130 years. NEPACS works to build bridges between prisoners, their families and the communities that they will return to upon their release. They strongly believe that investment must be made in resettlement and rehabilitation to ensure that there are fewer crime victims in the future, and less prospect of family life being disrupted and possibly destroyed by a prison sentence.

More information: www.nepacs.co.uk

For more information

For more information about the project or to receive a copy of the full interim evaluation, contact:

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Practising nappy changing